FROM THE BOOKSHELF #170 SEPTEMBER 1, 1978
ROGER LYONS

THE YEAR IN BOOKS (YEARENDER)

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EDITOR: (CONT'D) BELLOW ACHIEVED HIS FIRST BIG HIT IN 1964 WITH THE PUBLICATION OF "HERZOG," A NOVEL ABOUT THE PROBLEMS OF A UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR ALIENATED FROM HIS ENVIRONMENT.

OPT

SAUL BELLOW'S FICTION DRAWS HEAVILY FROM HIS OWN LIFE EXPERIENCE. HIS HEROES ARE USUALLY JEWISH, URBANE AND INTELLECTUAL AND THEIR ADVENTURES ARE TOUCHED WITH BELLOW'S SPECIAL BRAND OF HUMOR. /BORN IN MONTREAL OF RUSSIAN PARENTS, BELLOW AND HIS FAMILY MOVED TO CHICAGO WHEN SAUL WAS NINE AND MANY COLORFUL EPISODES OF HIS NOVELS TAKE PLACE IN THAT CITY. AS HE TOLD ONE INTERVIEWER:

TAPE: CUT ONE -- BELLOW

"IN CHICAGO THERE USED TO BE A PLACE CALLED BUGHOUSE SQUARE... ACTUALLY IT WAS THE NEWBERRY SQUARE, IN FRONT OF THE HUGE, WONDERFUL NEWBERRY LIBRARY IN CHICAGO AND THERE ALL KINDS OF INTERESTING BOHEMIANS (ARTISTIC TYPES) AND WANDERERS USED TO GATHER ON A SUMMER EVENING OR EMERGE FROM THE LIBRARY AND DELIVER SPEECHES ON ALL KINDS OF TOPICS AND I WAS FASCINATED BY THE KIND OF RHETORIC ONE WOULD HEAR THERE AND BY THE LANGUAGE AND THOUGHT OF THESE SELF-INSTRUCTED PEOPLE AND I WOULD SOMETIMES ENTERTAIN MYSELF BY WRITING HYPOTHETICAL SPEECHES BY THESE CHARACTERS ON VARIOUS TOPICS THAT I THOUGHT OF MYSELF."

EDITOR: BEFORE RECEIVING THE NOBEL LAURELS, SAUL BELLOW HAD ALREADY WON THREE NATIONAL BOOK AWARDS AND A PULITZER PRIZE. ALMOST ALL HIS WORKS, INCLUDING "SAMMLER'S PLANET" AND "HUMBOLDT'S GIFT," DEAL WITH MODERN INTELLECTUALS SEEKING SELF-REALIZATION AND MEANING AMID THE PRESSURES OF A DEMANDING SOCIETY. /BELLOW FEELS THAT HIS JOY IN WRITING IS ESSENTIAL TO WHATEVER VALUE HIS WORKS MAY HAVE.

TAPE: CUT TWO -- BELLOW

OPT

"I FEEL THAT IF PLEASURE IS NO LONGER AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE CREATIVE ACT SOMETHING IS SERIOUSLY WRONG BECAUSE YOU CHOOSE A RATHER DIFFICULT POSITION FOR YOURSELF WHEN YOU BECOME A WRITER AND YOU SIT ALONE IN A ROOM AND STRUGGLE WITH THE DESTINIES OF PEOPLE AND THE SORT OF ISOLATION INHERENT IN THE VERY POSITION THAT YOU PUT YOURSELF INTO, AND, IF IN SOLITUDE, YOU ALSO SUFFER A GREAT DEAL AND FEEL ONLY THE DIFFICULTY OF THE PREDICAMENT AND THE STRAIN AND LABOR OF WRITING THEN THERE'S SOMETHING VERY WRONG." /

EDITOR: BELLOW BROUGHT OUT HIS FIRST NON-FICTION BOOK IN 1976. CALLED "TO JERUSALEM AND BACK", IT'S A PERSONAL ACCOUNT OF HIS VISIT IN ISRAEL IN 1975.

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THERE WAS ONE MAJOR LITERARY EVENT IN 1976 THAT HAD MORE TO DO WITH AUTHORS' RIGHTS THAN WITH THEIR BOOKS. THIS WAS THE PASSAGE OF A NEW AND FAR-REACHING U.S. COPYRIGHT LAW. FULL OF COMPLEXITIES AND MORE THAN A DECADE IN THE MAKING, IT EXPANDED THE PROTECTION OF ARTISTS FROM PLAGIARISM AND PIRACY OF THEIR WORKS. /

ALTHOUGH NORMAN MAILER HAS BEEN WORKING FOR FOUR YEARS ON A NOVEL, IT STILL AWAITS PUBLICATION. IN THE MEANTIME, BOOK AFTER BOOK OF JOURNALISM POURS FORTH FROM HIS PROLIFIC PEN. AFTER A PROFILE OF MARILYN MONROE AND COVERAGE OF THE MUHAMMAD ALI-GEORGE FOREMAN FIGHT IN ZAIRE, MAILER SWITCHED IN 1976 TO AN ANTHOLOGY OF, AND COMMENTARY ON, THAT LITERARY PIONEER IN THE FIELD OF EXPLICIT SEX, HENRY MILLER. THE BOOK IS CALLED "GENIUS AND LUST." MAILER CALLS MILLER "AMERICA'S GREATEST LIVING NOVELIST." SOME CRITICS HAVE SAID THAT ABOUT MAILER HIMSELF.

EDITOR: (CONT'D) HIGHEST ON THE BEST SELLERS' LIST WAS LEON URIS'S "TRINITY" WHICH TAKES IRELAND'S TROUBLES AS ITS THEME. KURT VONNEGUT, IDOL OF THE HIPPY SIXTIES, WROTE YET ANOTHER NIGHTMARISH FANTASY, "SLAPSTICK," TO UNDERLINE HIS VIEW THAT LIFE IS A KIND OF MAD JOKE. PETER BENCHLEY, WHO SCORED 1975'S GREATEST POPULAR SUCCESS, WITH "JAWS," A STORY OF A GREAT WHITE SHARK, A HIT BOTH AS A NOVEL AND A MOVIE, HAS WRITTEN A SEQUEL, "THE DEEP," ALSO VERY POPULAR.

1976 ALSO SAW THE PUBLICATION OF JOHN UPDIKE'S EIGHTH NOVEL "MARRY ME." SET IN THE KENNEDY ERA, IT SHOWS HOW MUCH AMERICAN MORAL ATTITUDES HAVE CHANGED IN LITTLE MORE THAN A DECADE.

NOT MANY SIGNIFICANT CONTEMPORARY BIOGRAPHIES CAME OUT IN 1976, BUT TWO BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS, "HOW IT WAS" BY ERNEST HEMINGWAY'S WIFE, MARY, AND "PAPA" BY HIS SON, GREGORY, THROW A FAVORABLE LIGHT ON THE FAMOUS AMERICAN AUTHOR. ANOTHER BOOK IN THIS CATEGORY, DORIS KEARN'S "LYNDON JOHNSON AND THE AMERICAN DREAM" WAS CALLED BY THE NEW YORK TIMES "PROBABLY THE WARMEST AND MOST SENSITIVE PORTRAIT OF A PRESIDENT WE HAVE HAD." MRS. KEARNS WAS A CLOSE CONFIDANTE OF MR. JOHNSON DURING HIS LAST YEARS AS PRESIDENT AND SHE REMAINED WITH HIM UNTIL HIS DEATH IN 1973, HELPING HIM WITH HIS MEMOIRS.

1976 SAW A LOT OF BOOKS, FICTION AND NON-FICTION, ON THE PROBLEMS OF THE FAMILY MAINTAINING ITSELF AS AN INSTITUTION IN THE MODERN WORLD. ALEX HALEY'S "ROOTS" FALLS INTO THIS CATEGORY. READING LIKE A DETECTIVE STORY, IT RECOUNTS

EDITOR: (CONT'D) HALEY'S TEN-YEAR SEARCH FOR AND FINAL DISCOVERY OF HIS FAMILY'S AFRICAN PRE-SLAVERY ORIGINS.

RUSSIA AND CHINA, AS USUAL, TOPPED THE SUBJECTS OF BOOKS ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS. EARLIER IN THE YEAR, TWO BOOKS OF PERSONAL IMPRESSIONS AND EVALUATIONS OF THE SOVIET UNION BY FORMER MOSCOW CORRESPONDENTS HEDRICK SMITH OF THE NEW YORK TIMES AND ROBERT KAISER OF THE WASHINGTON POST WERE WIDELY PRAISED AND READ. ALEXANDER SOLZHENITSYN AND ANDREI SINYAVSKY, WHOSE PEN NAME IS ABRAM TERTZ, WERE AMONG SOVIET DISSIDENTS WHO CAME TO THE PUBLIC'S ATTENTION. MOST OF THE BOOKS ON CHINA WERE OF THE SCHOLARLY VARIETY. MAO TSE TUNG'S DEATH CAME TOO LATE IN THE YEAR FOR THE ARRAY OF BOOKS THAT WILL EVENTUALLY TRY TO ASSESS HIS LONG REIGN.

PERHAPS THE MOST IMPORTANT BOOK BY A FOREIGNER SINGLED OUT FOR TOP ATTENTION AND HIGH PRAISE WAS GABRIEL MARQUEZ'S NEW NOVEL, "AUTUMN OF THE PATRIARCH," A HIGHLY IMAGINATIVE, SURREAL LOOK BY THE COLOMBIAN AT THE DEPREDATIONS OF WHAT MIGHT BE CALLED A COMPOSITE PICTURE OF A SOUTH AMERICAN DICTATOR.

ON THE DOMESTIC POLITICAL SCENE, JIMMY CARTER'S "WHY NOT THE BEST?" SUMMED UP MUCH OF THE PRESIDENT-ELECT'S BASIC PHILOSOPHY. MOST OTHER NEWSWORTHY BOOKS ON CONTEMPORARY POLITICS WERE SPIN-OFFS FROM WATERGATE. BOB WOODWARD AND CARL BERNSTEIN, WHOSE INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING PLAYED A KEY ROLE IN PRESIDENT NIXON'S RESIGNATION, PUBLISHED A SEQUEL TO "ALL THE PRESIDENT'S MEN," 1975'S TOP NON-FICTION BEST SELLER, WHICH WAS ALSO MADE INTO A SUCCESSFUL FILM.

EDITOR: (CONT'D) THE 1976 BOOK, CALLED "THE FINAL DAYS," OFFERED THE AUTHORS' BEHIND-THE-SCENES PORTRAIT OF RICHARD NIXON'S LAST MONTHS AS PRESIDENT. THERE WAS CONSIDERABLE ARGUMENT AMONG THE CRITICS AS TO ITS OBJECTIVITY. SEVERAL OTHER LEADING FIGURES CONNECTED WITH THE WATERGATE AFFAIR PUBLISHED BOOKS. AMONG THEM WERE LEON JAWORSKI AND SAMUEL DASH, LAWYERS INVOLVED IN MR. NIXON'S PROSECUTION, AND NIXON AIDES JOHN EHRLICHMAN AND JOHN DEAN.

THE ONLY REAL EMINENT MAN OF LETTERS TO PASS AWAY SINCE THE DEATH OF THORNTON WILDER IN LATE 1975 WAS THE AMERICAN HISTORIAN, SAMUEL ELIOT MORISON. KNOWN FOR HIS BIOGRAPHIES OF COLUMBUS AND THE EARLY EXPLORERS OF THE AMERICAS, HE WAS PRAISED FOR HIS GRACEFUL AND READABLE LITERARY STYLE. /TO ACHIEVE HISTORICAL AUTHENTICITY, HE RETRACED MANY OF THE VOYAGES OF HIS SUBJECTS IN HIS OWN SAILBOAT. APPOINTED OFFICIAL NAVAL HISTORIAN OF WORLD WAR II, HE WITNESSED IN PERSON MANY OF THE BATTLES OF THAT WAR, EARNING THE TITLE OF ADMIRAL. AT THE TIME OF HIS DEATH, MORISON WAS EIGHTY-EIGHT YEARS OLD. /

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ANNCR: YOU HAVE BEEN LISTENING TO A SUMMARY OF HIGHLIGHTS IN THE WORLD OF BOOKS DURING 1976, PREPARED BY ROGER LYONS. LISTEN NEXT WEEK (AT THIS SAME TIME) FOR ANOTHER REPORT ON BOOKS AMERICANS ARE READING... FROM THE BOOKSHELF.

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